

I rise to pay tribute to one of the giants of American history. Today we honor the remarkable life and legacy of Rosa Parks, who died just last evening at the age of 92.

The Detroit News today says:

Courage in the face of oppression; resistance in the face of injustice. That is the enduring legacy of Rosa Parks, whose defiance on a racially segregated Montgomery, Ala., bus lit the flame of the modern civil rights movement and inspired freedom movements from South Africa to Poland.

The Detroit Free Press today:

When Rosa Parks refused to get up, an entire race of people began to stand up for their rights as human beings. Her refusal to give up her bus seat to a white man was a simple act that took extraordinary courage in Montgomery, Ala., in 1955. It was a place where black people had no rights that white people had to respect. It was a time when racial discrimination was so common, many blacks never questioned it. At least not out loud. But then came Rosa Louise Parks.

I am so proud Rosa Parks was a resident of Michigan. We have claimed her for many years and are so proud that she has left her legacy to all of us, particularly in Detroit, MI.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks left work in her hometown of Montgomery, AL, and boarded a bus headed for home. When the bus became crowded, she was ordered by the bus driver to give up her seat to a white male passenger. She refused. Rosa Parks was arrested, and 4 days later the Montgomery bus boycott began. The boycott lasted for over a year until the Montgomery buses were officially desegregated in December of 1956.

Rosa Parks was a courageous woman who did what she believed was fair and right. She is a testament to the power of one individual willing to fight for their beliefs. Her actions set the civil rights movement in motion and set a precedent for protest without violence. We all owe a debt of gratitude to Rosa Parks for her contribution to freedom and justice for all men and women in this country. Truly, her actions changed the course of history.

Rosa Parks moved to Detroit in 1957 and it became home for her for nearly 50 years. In 1977, she and Elaine Easton Steele founded the Raymond and Rosa Parks Institute for Self-Development in Detroit to offer guidance to young African-Americans. The institute's many programs include the annual Pathways to Freedom bus tour that exposes young African Americans to landmarks of the civil rights era.

The people of Michigan take great pride in the fact that Rosa Parks became part of our community in our great State. She devoted her life to public service, to helping people, and to helping to serve as a role model for our children. She made such an impact on our country and on the people of the metro Detroit community that the actual bus where Rosa Parks made her defiant stand is now on display at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, MI.

Children from all over the world have come to see the bus that became this

symbol of the civil rights movement. Nicknamed the Mother of Civil Rights, President Clinton awarded Rosa Parks the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996, the highest civilian award this country can bestow. Mrs. Parks also received the Congressional Gold Medal in 1999. Earlier this year, Senator LEVIN and I introduced a bill to name a Federal building in Detroit after Mrs. Parks. We think it is important that we recognize her in this way to thank her in some small way for her incredible contribution to our country. It is an honor she richly deserves, and I believe it is important that we pass this bill this week in the Senate, just as the House has passed the bill, so that we can together, in a unanimous way, say: Thank you, Rosa Parks.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I join others the world over in mourning the death and giving thanks for the life of Mrs. Rosa Parks. Someone once said that in the instance Rosa Parks refused to move, somewhere in the universe a gear in the machinery shifted. Jim Crow had finally met his match.

Rosa Parks was an accomplished seamstress who helped us all see that America's great strength is the fact that we are one cloth sewn together in a splendid coat of many colors. It is often reported that Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus that day in Montgomery, AL, because her feet were tired.

That was not so. She said many times:

I was not physically tired—or no more than I usually was at the end of a working day. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.

It would be more than a year before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Montgomery's segregated buses were unconstitutional.

To this day, the Montgomery bus boycott remains the largest and most successful act of civil disobedience in the history of the United States of America, all inspired by this simple, courageous woman. For 381 days, tens of thousands of hard-working middle class, lower class, and all classes of African Americans walked miles to work every day in the heat, in the cold, in the rain. Many of the boycotters, including Mrs. Parks and her husband Raymond, lost their jobs, but they never lost their faith. They persevered with courage and with dignity.

In the end, they did not just change the law; they changed our Nation, and they changed the world. The image of Rosa Parks sitting quietly on that bus waiting to be arrested is etched forever in our national consciousness, but it is not simply refusing to give up her seat that made Rosa Parks so great. It was a refusal to give up hope, especially her hope in young people.

In 1955, Mrs. Parks was the leader of the Montgomery NAACP local youth organization. It is one of the lesser known parts of her story that the evening she was arrested she was in the process of rejuvenating that youth

group. Her dedication to the next generation is the reason she founded the Raymond and Rosa Parks Institute for Self-Development in Detroit, MI. Her faith was tested, but it was never broken. After Mrs. Parks was robbed and beaten in her own home in 1992, she implored people "not to read too much into the attack."

"Young people need to be taught to respect and care for their elders," she said. "Despite the violence and crime in our society, we should not let fear overwhelm us. We must remain strong. We must not give up hope; we can overcome."

This morning's Detroit Free Press has a wonderful story on Mrs. Parks' life and legacy. In it, U.S. Appeals Court Judge Damon Keith, a longtime friend of Mrs. Parks, recalls when another living icon of freedom, Nelson Mandela, visited Detroit in 1990.

When he got off the plane, a long line of dignitaries was waiting to greet the great man. President Mandela scanned the line until his eyes rested on a tiny woman. "He chanted Rosa, Rosa, Rosa Parks," Judge Keith recalls.

President Mandela told Mrs. Parks that she was his inspiration during the long years he was jailed on Robbins Island, and that her example had inspired South Africa's freedom fighters. Later, in a 1993 speech to the NAACP, Nelson Mandela called Rosa Parks "the David who challenged Goliath."

Ms. Johnnie Carr, Mrs. Parks' longtime friend, said Mrs. Parks always believed that the Montgomery bus boycott was "ordained by God." It was meant to be. But it almost did not happen. In her autobiography, Mrs. Parks wrote that, had she not been so tired that day, she would have waited for the next bus, because she would have recognized the driver of the Number 7 bus as the same man who had put her off the bus years earlier for refusing to board through the back door.

On that earlier occasion, in 1943, Mrs. Parks had just tried, unsuccessfully, to register to vote. Twelve years later—the morning after the long Montgomery bus boycott ended—Mrs. Parks again boarded the Number 7 bus, paid her fare, and took her seat in the front of the bus. By coincidence—or perhaps by divine design—the bus driver that day was the same man who had called the police to have her arrested more than a year earlier. His name was James Blake. And he lived in a little town call Equality, GA.

The Detroit Free Press this morning quotes from one of the last interviews Rosa Parks gave. A decade ago, in an interview with that newspaper, Mrs. Parks was asked how she hoped to be remembered. She replied, "I'd like people to say that I'm a person that always wanted to be free, and wanted it not only for myself—freedom for all human beings."

That is a great tribute to a great lady who we remember today.

I yield the floor to the chairman of the committee.